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## **Proceedings Paper:**

Carver, Martin Oswald Hugh [orcid.org/0000-0002-7981-5741](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7981-5741) (1986) Sutton Hoo in Context. In: Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo: Angli e Sassoni al di qua e al di là del mare. Centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, Spoleto, pp. 77-123.

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MARTIN O. H. CARVER

## SUTTON HOO IN CONTEXT

Estratto da:

*Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*

XXXII

ANGOLI E BARRONI AL DI QUA E AL DI LÀ DEL MARE

Spoleto, 26 aprile - 1° maggio 1984

MARTIN O. H. CARVER

## SUTTON HOO IN CONTEXT

The Exceptional richness of the great ship-burial at Sutton Hoo has provoked comparison with the tombs of Childeric<sup>1</sup> and Philip II of Macedon<sup>2</sup>, not to mention Tutankhamun, monuments with a powerful emotional appeal for all who come to know of them. Whether or not the grassy mound excavated at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk in 1939 was the tomb of Raedwald, King of East Anglia, the site and its discoveries are certainly evocative. All the more important then, that the search for archaeological context be conducted dispassionately. Many factors may be involved which find no reflection in the literature of the heroic age, and a hero is in any case an unreliable guide to the underworld.

Sutton Hoo is a small barrow cemetery situated beside the River Deben in south-east Suffolk, England (Plate I, fig. 1). The first recorded investigation dates from 1860 when a mound containing a large number of iron "screw bolts" (ie. ship rivets) was disturbed, without otherwise being recorded<sup>3</sup>. By 1938, at least 15 barrows (tumuli) survived to a greater or lesser extent and during that year and the next, trenches were driven through four of them. All proved to be Anglo-Saxon and nearly contemporary in date,

(1) WERNER, 1971; 1982; 193; BRUCE-MITFORD 1978b. For Childeric's tomb., CHIFLET 1655.

(2) VIERCK 1980.

(3) *Ipswich Journal* 24th November, 1860.

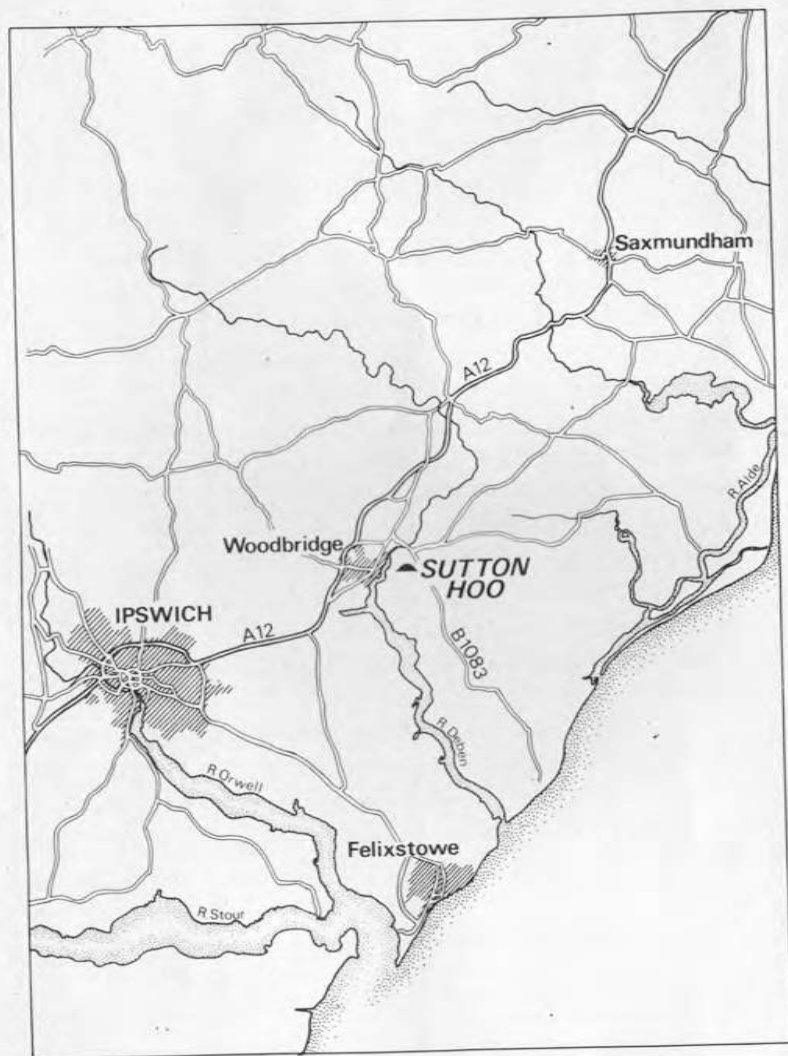


FIG. 1 - Sutton Hoo location plan (E. Hooper)

that is, late 6th or early 7th century AD. At least two of the mounds had contained cremations and the other two, boats, but the burial deposit was intact only beneath mound 1. This contained some 263 finds derived from some 58 objects, laid out or hung up in a wooden burial chamber constructed in the centre of an oak clinker-built rowing boat 89 ft. (26 m) long<sup>4</sup> (fig. 2). Subsequent investigations between 1965 and 1971 established the presence of inhumations and cremations outside the barrows, also of the Anglo-Saxon period, and confirmed that the barrow cemetery overlay a sequence of prehistoric settlements<sup>5</sup>. Since 1947 the site and its discoveries have been meticulously studied by Rupert Bruce-Mitford, whose three-volume publication was completed at the end of last year.

The excavators found no trace of a body beneath mound 1, although the disposition of the regalia seemed to indicate a space for one, and subsequent analyses render its total disappearance quite plausible<sup>6</sup>. Cremated bone found in a primary position might have been human<sup>7</sup>, and ironclamps disposed on either side of the "body-space" might have derived from a coffin, podium, bed or the burial chamber itself<sup>8</sup>. It clear from the stratification of the many objects (not all shown on the plan, fig. 3) that a three-dimensional arrangement was involved; but we do not know what it was.

(4) The 1938 excavations are published in BRUCE-MITFORD 1975: 100-136. For the 1939 excavations see *Antiquity* 1940, HAWKES CFC 1964; BRUCE-MITFORD 1972a, 1975, 1978a, 1979, 1983.

(5) The second principal campaign comprised the re-excavation of Mound 1 by Bruce-Mitford and Ashbee, noted in BRUCE-MITFORD 1975: 230-344, and the opening of 6 small areas to the north, near mound 5, for which see Longworth and Kinnes, 1980.

(6) Discussed in BRUCE-MITFORD, 1975: 488-573; and see BIDDLE, 1977 and Vierck 1980 for reservations about this explanation for the disappearance of a body.

(7) Suggested by VIERCK 1972, 1980; challenged by EVISON 1980; BRUCE-MITFORD, 1975.

(8) Coffin suggested by EVISON, 1980; Challenged by VIERCK 1980.

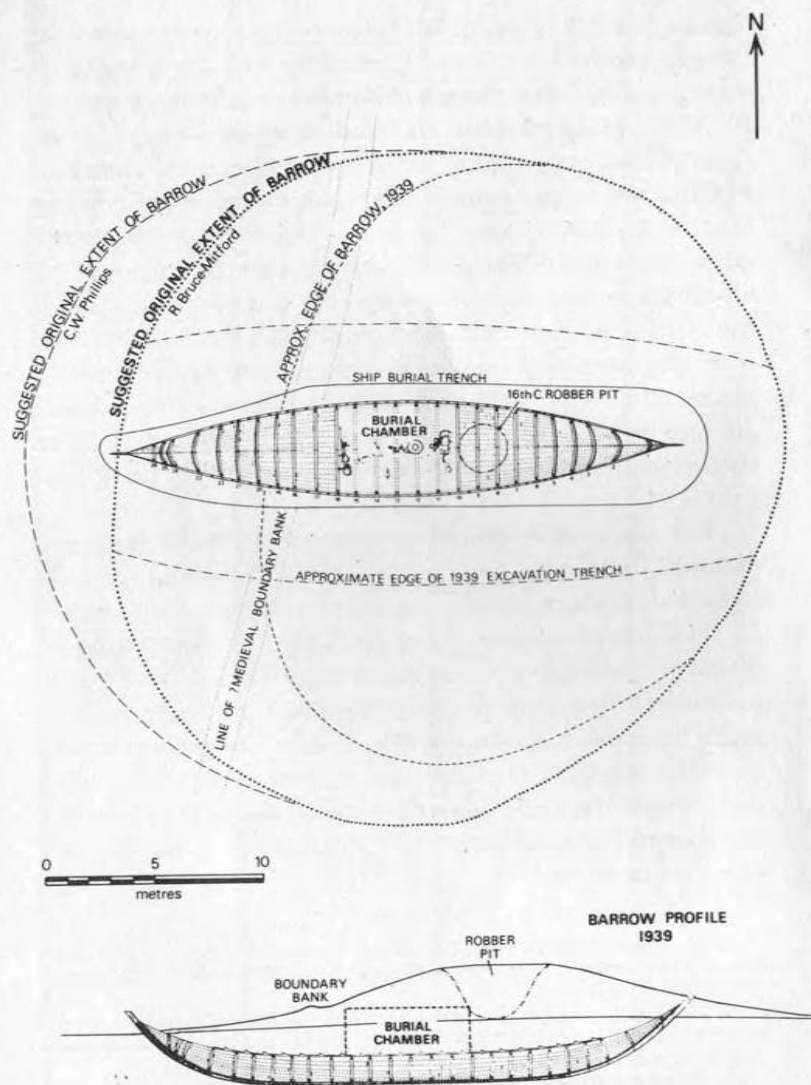


FIG. 2 - Sutton Hoo: the Mound 1 boat with the barrow and burial chamber superimposed (Drawing by E. Hooper, after Bruce-Mitford, 1975)

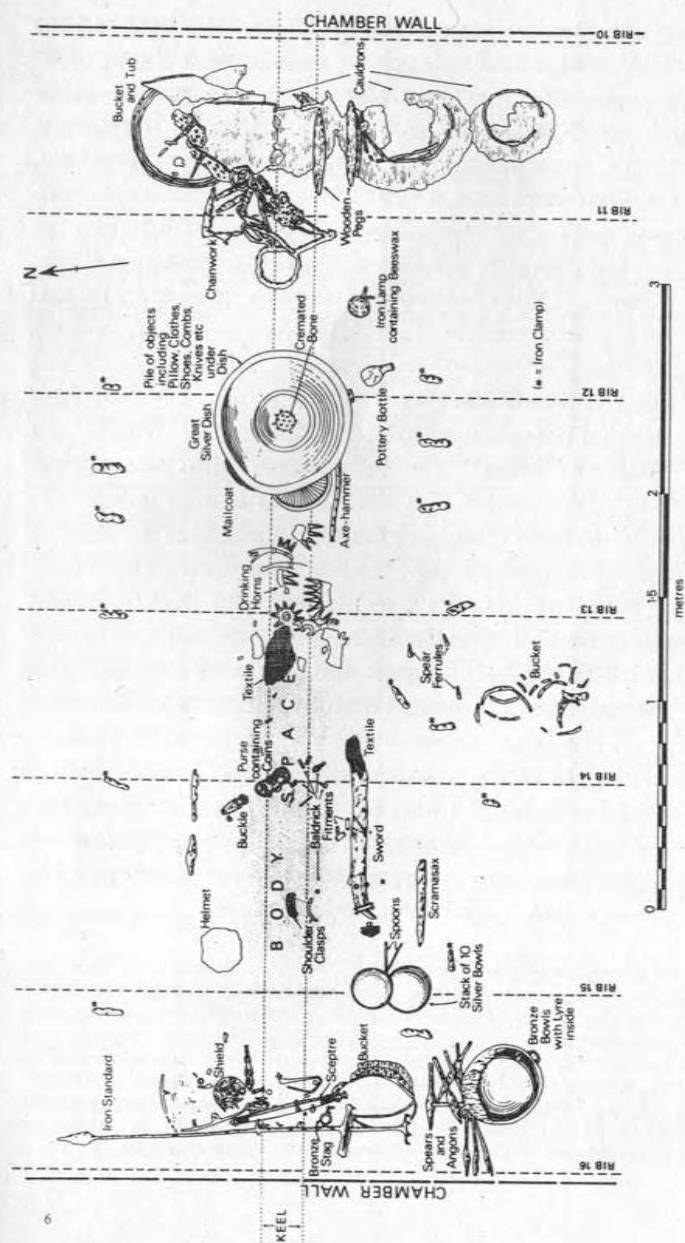


FIG. 3 - Sutton Hoo: Mound 1 plan of burial chamber (after Bruce-Mitford, 1975)



The objects display a quality and variety that is hard to parallel, either individually or as an assemblage. The predominant artistry of the metalwork is of a type favoured in Kent, Sweden and Merovingian France. A number of the objects, for example the 'sceptre' and the 'standard' have no obvious practical function and appear to be symbolic and archaic. The silver bowl and spoons display Christian insignia and have been claimed to denote a Christian influence. The character of the weapons, utensils and other identifiable artifacts included in the burial, suggest a wealthy man with wide interest and contacts, as well as an extensive wardrobe. Bruce-Mitford and his team suggest a foreign provenance for 26 of the objects, that is, just under half the total. The remainder, comprising some goldwork and textiles, and all the iron and wood, are thought of as local (East Anglian) manufacture<sup>9</sup>. Nine of the 58 objects suggest a date, and of these two are independent of typology, namely the 'Anastasius' dish, stamped between 491 and 518 AD, and the beeswax lamp, radiocarbon dated  $523 \pm 45$  AD. Expert opinion on the Merovingian coins, meanwhile, has settled on a deposition date of c. 625 AD<sup>10</sup>.

As a result of these extensive studies, Bruce-Mitford concludes that mound 1 was the inhumation of Raedwald, King of East Anglia, who was baptised in Kent, compromised with paganism on his return, subsequently assumed the title 'Bredwalda', and died about 625 AD.<sup>11</sup>

(9) For provenance of objects from Mound 1, see BRUCE-MITFORD 1978a, 1983. For discussion of 'exotic' objects, see below. A bull's head, similar to those on the Sutton Hoo 'Standard' has recently been found at the 'princely' site of Clogher, Ireland (Richard Warner, pers. comm.).

(10) Lafaurie 1960 revised the dating of the coin hoard to c. 625. (noticed in HAWKES CFC 1964). MUSSET 1969: 307 suggested that the majority of numismatists still favoured 660-670; JPC Kent in BRUCE-MITFORD, 1972b and 1975 uses both typological arguments and specific gravity measurements to conclude a deposition date around 625.

(11) BRUCE-MITFORD, 1975: 683-717; cf. STENTON 1959, WHITELOCK, 1972.

However, due to the uncertainties already mentioned, other interpretations are possible and acknowledged. The burial in mound 1 can be an inhumation, a cremation, a cenotaph, or following Arrhenius' suggestion for Vendel, a sacrificial deposit commemorating an event rather than a person<sup>12</sup>.

Even if accepted as a royal tomb, we cannot guarantee that any of its contents were the property of the monarch when alive, rather than gifts arriving for funeral celebrations from elsewhere. Even if the whole assemblage can be seen as Raedwald's property, it may indicate more of an international court life than the culture of East Anglia<sup>13</sup>. It cannot be assumed that objects of precious metal displaying Christian symbols denote active Christianity, especially in an otherwise pagan context. Nor should we forget that the Sutton Hoo ship-burial is tied to Raedwald principally by the dating of the coins, which is itself determined stylistic by a typology which has shown some mobility in the past, and secondly by specific gravity measurements which contain a range of error which is the intrinsic property of all such scientific analyses<sup>14</sup>. There is no space to pursue the question here, but it should perhaps be stated that it would be unwise to fasten our typological anchors into an assemblage that may yet prove to have been deposited later, or indeed, earlier than Raedwald.

(12) ARRHENIUS 1983: 67. The earlier 'boat burials' sunk in inland lakes or bays (eg Nydam 3-5thc) are interpreted as votive offerings, (Ørnes 1970; Ilkjaer and Løndstrup 1982). CRUMLIN-PEDERSEN (1981: 273) shows that burials and sacrifices continue together into the 8thC.

(13) VIERCK 1980. R. WARNER (pers. comm.) offers a similar interpretation of an international 'set' for the contemporary Irish 'Kings', cf. WORMALD, "Theirs was a cosmopolitan rather than a national vision" (1983: 103).

(14) BRUCE-MITFORD 1975.

## II.

The problem becomes more acute when we come to consider the structure and position of the whole cemetery. Although mound 1 was the largest of those that survived in 1938, it was not much larger than some of the mounds (eg. 2, 7 or 10) that remain (fig. 4). Initially, this seems to mark the cemetery out from others in England, where barrows of the period seem to be large and isolated, or small and in groups of several hundred, the latter mainly in Kent<sup>15</sup>, (fig. 5). It also lies outside the general distribution of either type and may appear to share attributes with the small cemeteries of rich 'warrior' barrows, such as are supposed at Uppsala or Valsgärde, rather than single monumental mounds such as Taplow or Ottharshügel.

It may, however, have been both of these things added together, if Mound 1 was the earliest on the site, and originally stood alone (see below). It is equally likely, moreover, that the 'unusual' character of Sutton Hoo is an illusion caused by the extensive destruction of barrows on what has now become cultivated land elsewhere in East Anglia<sup>16</sup>. Mixed cemeteries of barrows and flat graves illustrate the point, made by Sonia Hawkes for Finglesham and demonstrated again by Catherine Hills in her extensive excavations at Spong Hill<sup>17</sup>. Snape, some 16 km. from Sutton Hoo, is known to be another 'hierarchical' cemetery, where flat-graves, barrows and in this case, ship burial, exist together<sup>18</sup>. In its topographical structure,

(15) SHEPARD 1979.

(16) cf. LAWSON et al. 1981.

(17) For Finglesham see HAWKES S. C. and POLLARD 1981. For Spong Hill, HILLS, 1977, 1981.

(18) BRUCE-MITFORD 1974 114-140.

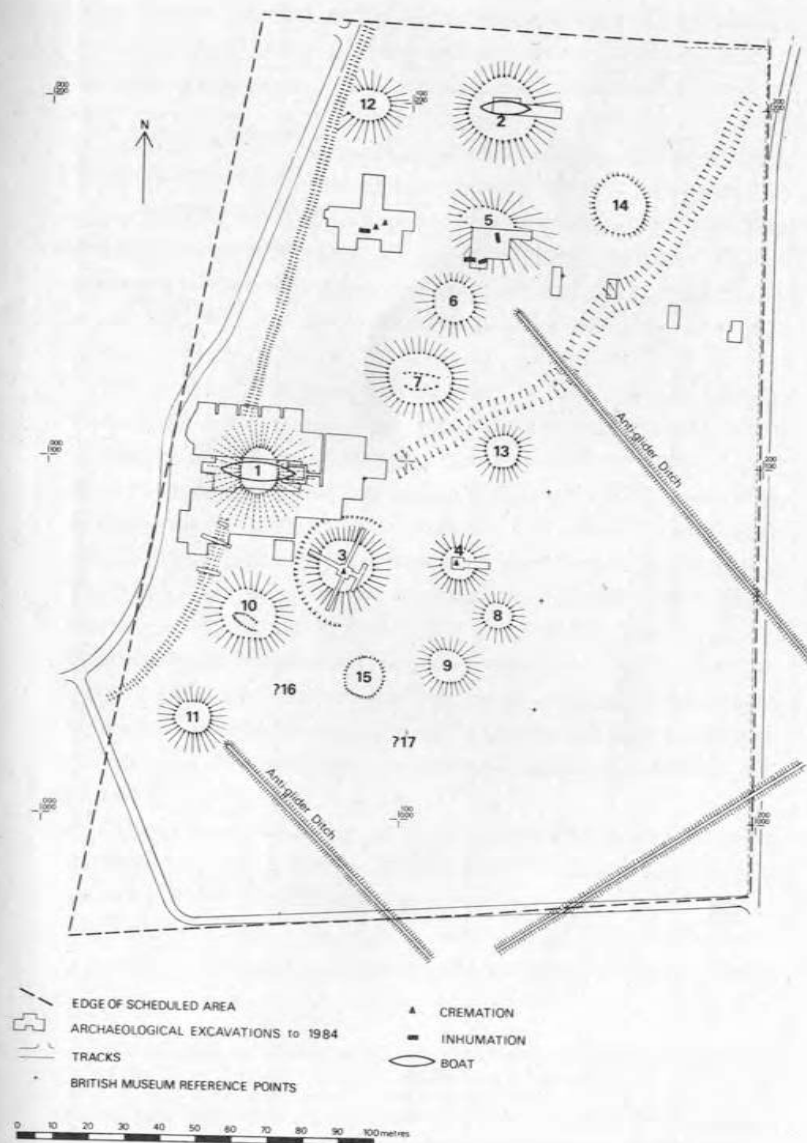


FIG. 4 - Sutton Hoo: plan of the cemetery site as known in 1970 (after Bruce-Mitford, 1975)

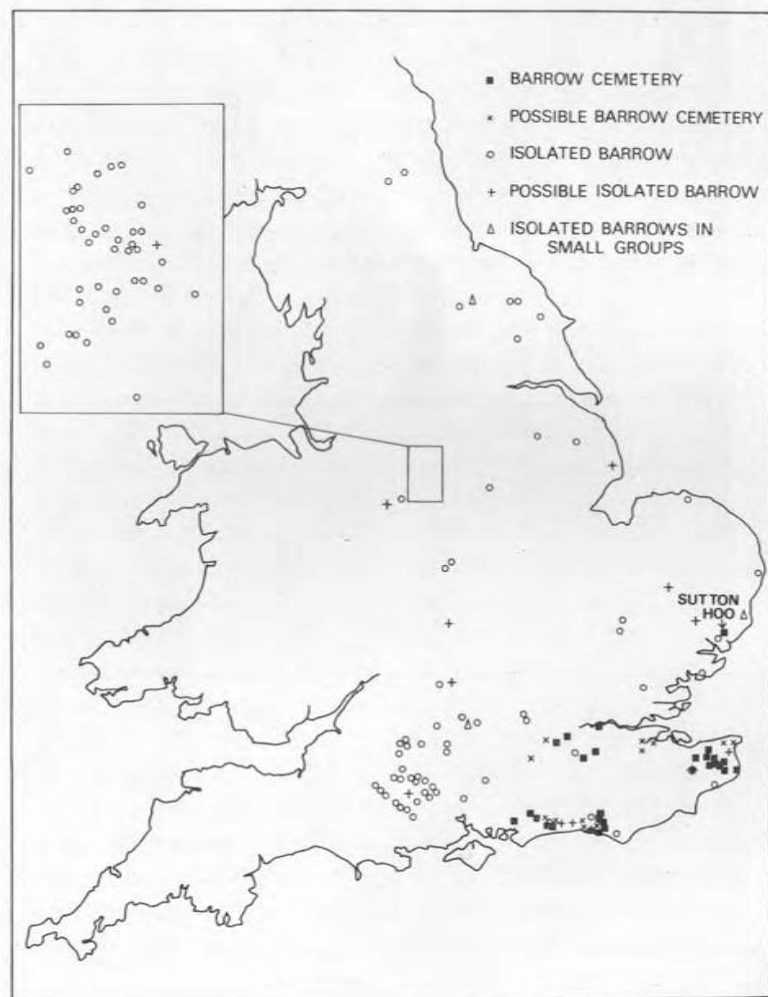


FIG. 5 - Barrow cemeteries and barrow groups in Britain (after Shephard, 1979)

Sutton Hoo may follow these models, and may, like Vendel, manifest only the surviving monuments of a much larger flat-grave cemetery. But arguments about the function of the cemetery can scarcely proceed further without knowledge of its overall structure. Quite different contexts are implied by an isolated group of rich graves of the same period, a contemporary group of barrows and flat graves, an evolutionary sequence where common graves precede chamber graves and barrow- and boat-burials, or a 'devolutionary' sequence beginning with a 'founder barrow' <sup>19</sup>.

If the burial deposit in Mound 1 represents the transition of the royal house from paganism to christianity, then it should logically have been the last barrow to be built. However, there is no independent corroboration of such a sequence. Mound 1 was constructed directly on plough soil and is nearest (of those which survive) to the edge of the scarp dropping down to the River Deben: no certain burials were found beneath it. It is at least as likely on present knowledge that Mound 1 was the first on the site, rather than the last. In this case, Sutton Hoo would become a Middle Saxon cemetery progressing from an early 7th century nucleus, or founder-burial, well into the "Christian" period.

These uncertainties affect not only our understanding of the community responsible for building Sutton Hoo, but also the definition of any hypothetical territory, to which the cemetery may be said to belong. If Sutton Hoo was a cemetery founded or favoured by kings, it can hardly be

(19) For Vendel, see ARRHENIUS 1983. The social interpretation of the probable structure of the Sutton Hoo cemetery is discussed by BRUCE-MITFORD 1975: 32; and SHEPHARD 1979: 49. For cemetery evolution in Sweden see eg. VENDEL 1983 and JANKAJS 1981; in Francia, JAMES 1980. For Kent, S. C. HAWKES 1982. For progression from rich nuclear burials in Francia, BULLOUGH 1983: 193 citing Krefeld-Gellup and Finglesham.



said to occupy a central place in the Kingdom to which it is assigned<sup>20</sup> (fig. 7). Does this mean that it is not *the* "royal" burial ground but only one among several, each aspiring to nobility? Or that the concept of centrality is irrelevant? The situation is interestingly paralleled elsewhere. The cemeteries of Vendel and Valsgärde, often compared with Sutton Hoo, should refer to the populace of the Mälaren Valley, and yet they too are peripheral to the settled area<sup>21</sup> (fig. 6). That at Uppsala might be more 'central' but no analogous candidate has emerged in East Anglia. Even if communications in early medieval north-west Europe were not so conspicuously dependent on waterways, the search for geographic centrality for either the living or the dead would probably be futile; the settlement pattern of both East Anglia and the Mälaren is characterised by numerous "royal" farms, many of which must have been contemporary. A succession of single rulers (if any such really existed in either region) may indeed have required a principal palace, such as Rendlesham, or a principal burial ground, such as Sutton Hoo, but we do not know this. Some of the 'princely' burial grounds of the Vendel period, have been attributed, not to kings, but to status-seeking chieftains, landowners, or patrons, who got rich on iron<sup>22</sup>.

Still more alternative explanations are suggested by the barrow-users of other prehistoric periods. In the West Halstatt province, Härke has shown how a period characterised by dispersed settlements and large urnfield cemeteries developed into one which had fortified sites (*fürstensitzen*) and wealthy burials in large barrows

(20) HILLS, 1983.

(21) LUNDSTRÖM 1983; AMBROSANI 1983a.

(22) HYENSTRAND 1981: 46; AMBROSANI 1983a: 21. See SAWYER 1983b for antiquity and wide distribution of royal estates, but impermanence of actual residences.

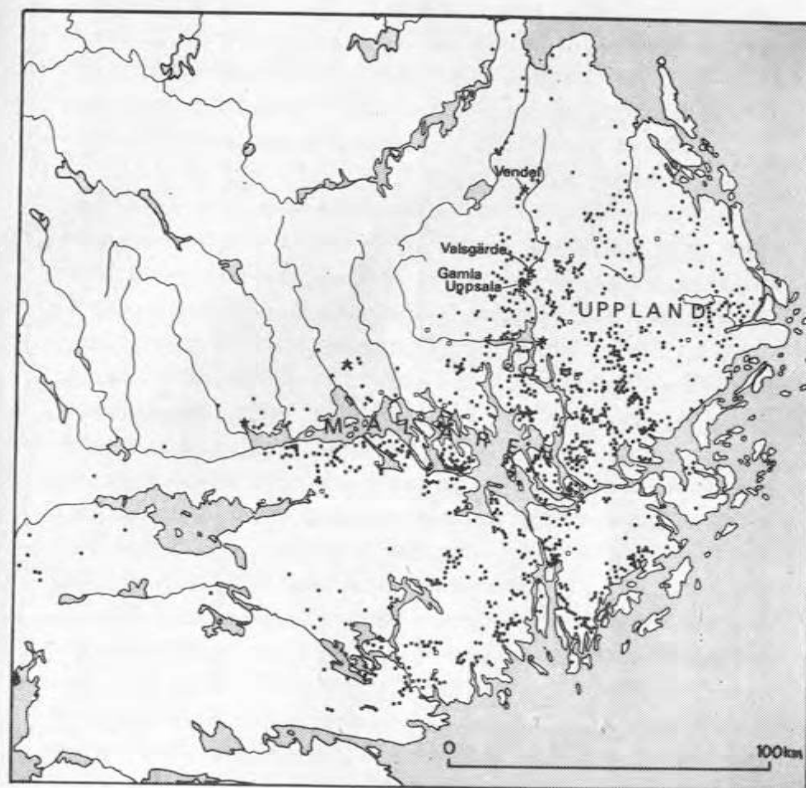


Fig. 6 - Distribution of cemeteries and settlement sites in the Mälaren Valley (Source: Ambrosiani, 1983)

(fürstengraben). However, not only do these new manifestations of power appear first outside the originally settled area and creep westwards, but in some cases the fürstengraben anticipate the fürstensitzen by up to a century<sup>23</sup>. This might imply the use of a barrow to claim newly acquired land, as well as a document to substantiate that claim in later years — a function suggested for barrows in Bronze Age Wessex<sup>24</sup>.

It is obviously not easily provable that the visibility of land from barrow-summits was used to settle territorial disputes, although most are notoriously sited to give a good view. That at Žuran bei Brunn, which contained an iron 'standard', and which may or may not have been established in this spirit by the Lombards in Pannonia, was used by Napoleon to direct the battle of Austerlitz. However, a distinction should be drawn between the possible role of a barrow as a landmark or sea-mark, and its adoption as a royal or folk centre: the disposition of early medieval barrows, as so far known, is against their having acted as *central* places<sup>25</sup>. Another suggestion, that the siting of royal or princely burials may have a complex relationship to land-holding and settlement patterns, is provided by Randsborg's hypothesis for 10th century Denmark<sup>26</sup>. Here the carriage graves of the women and cavalry graves of the men are claimed as being distributed along the periphery of an

(23) HARKE 1979.

(24) See, eg. BRADLEY, 1981. Similar ideas are implied for the Roman iron age in Germany (TODD 1977) and Anglo-Saxon England itself (SHEPARD 1979: 77).

(25) For Žuran, see POULIK 1949; WERNER 1958; KRÜGER 1971: 343; MELICCO-VACCARO 1982. RAHTZ, 1979 has suggested the importance of land-marks for locating palace sites, and Arnold (pers. comm.) has recently tried to define 'territories' for wealthy barrows with the aid of thüessen polygons. But a barrow might still indicate domination without indicating landownership in the conventional sense, cf the monumental tumulus set up by Germanicus in the forests of Germany to commemorate the lost legion of Varus (AKERMAN 1847). See also CHAPMAN 1980 for alternative models for the siting of cemeteries in relation to their settlements.

(26) RANDBORG 1980, 1981, 1982.

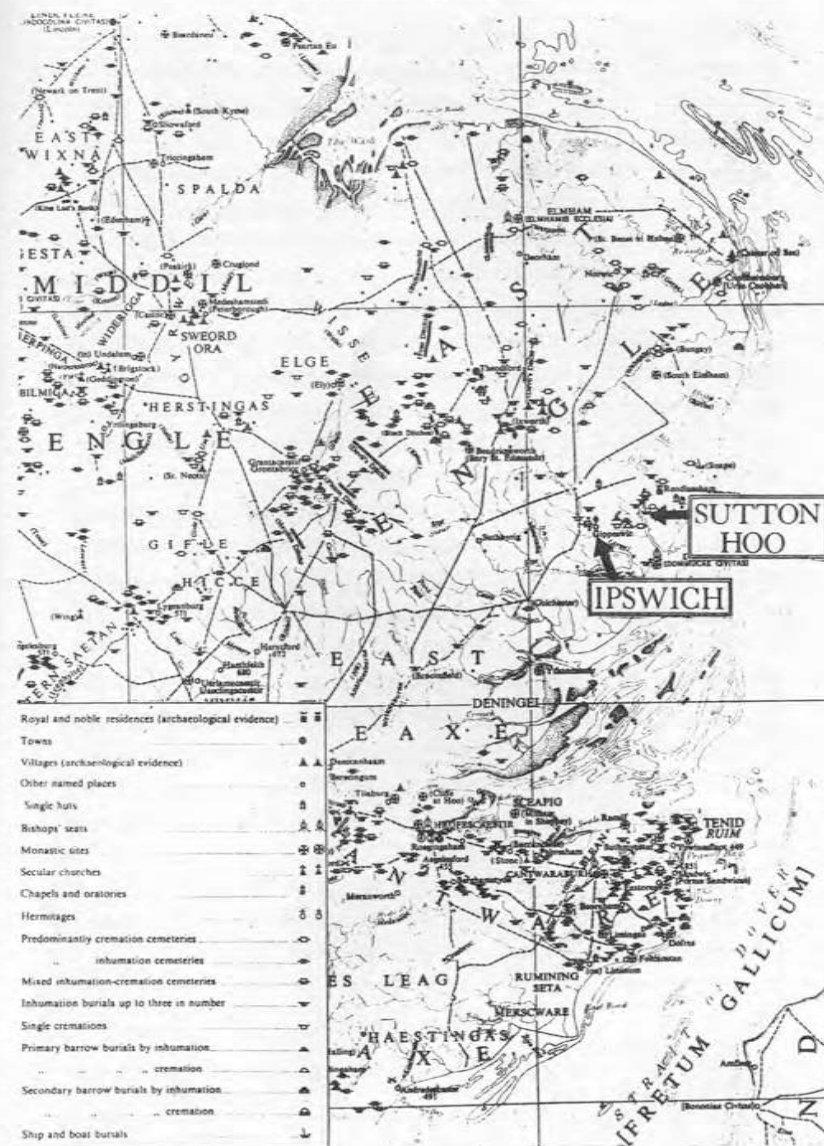


FIG. 7 - Distribution of cemeteries and settlement sites in East Anglia (Source: Ordnance Survey: Britain in the Dark Ages) (Crown Copyright reserved).

emergent state, whose central place is at Jelling. Randborg explains these burials as those of servants of the new state whose borders they may be protecting, or perhaps enlarging.

Some prehistorians, therefore, appear to be suggesting that diverse wealthy burials in barrows may be those of chiefs who have recently exercised a claim over land and whose heirs wish to retain it. The attempt to establish a state may follow, with the setting up of a principal entrepôt<sup>27</sup>. These episodes would have little to do with the periodic funerals of a resident pagan people, and could only be verified over a wide geographical area. In such an inquiry, the study of Sutton Hoo, Ipswich and the settled territory of East Anglia is indivisible (fig. 7).

Still other explanations for the siting of the cemetery are possible; that the first Anglo-Saxon barrow commemorated the place of death, ie. a place chosen by gods rather than men, or that it was added to a pre-existing Bronze Age or Roman barrow cemetery<sup>28</sup>. The latter possibility, at least, is testable by excavation. For the former, we would have to interrogate the gods themselves.

### III.

The motivation of a community and its beliefs are of course fundamental to the problem. How far does *burial-rite* indicate a religious or social context for Sutton Hoo? A number of significant factors can be imagined: — the

(27) Cf. BULLOUGH 1983: 194 who offers little support for this hypothesis for early medieval Europe, while not denying its plausibility. For a theory of early medieval state formation with particular reference to East Anglia and the role of Ipswich, see HODGES 1980.

(28) Cf. drowning and burial of Thord in *Laexdaela Saga* (HARMONDSWORTH, 1969) 129.

structure of the grave, what things were put in it, and how they were arranged. To these we might add a number of hypothetical rituals — such as the pouring of libations or the chanting of hymns, most of which will be 'beyond all conjecture' — or at least are generally considered beyond present-day archaeological sensitivity<sup>29</sup>.

The archaeological expectations are nevertheless high: race, religion and social organisation have all been claimed, reasonably enough, as being readable in cemeteries from burial practice. For Binford, social organisation, or at least a measure of its complexity, is the principal message. Others have pointed out that cemeteries might reflect the state of society as their constructors would like it to be, rather than what it actually is. Such wishful-thinking might well be religious in inspiration, religions such as later christianity, for example giving impoverished 'egalitarian' cemeteries in direct contradiction to the hierarchical societies which created them<sup>30</sup>. Neither does race seem a very satisfactory determinant of burial practice or of cemetery type, certainly not in Anglo-Saxon England<sup>31</sup>. Even an isolated intrusive cluster, such as the so-called 'Danube' contingent at Lankhills, (a late Roman Cemetery at Winchester), might have other explanations than race for characteristic grave-goods or burial rite<sup>32</sup>. Using the

(29) Cf. BROWNE 1650. Recent scholarship is turning again to the challenge of deducing religious and social belief through archaeological (cognitive) methods; see RENFREW, 1982.

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(32) ESMONDE-CLEARY, 1983.



skeletal material itself is no more reliable: witness the sudden and widespread change in skull-form in Norman York, at the one time when no large intrusive population is documented or suspected<sup>33</sup>.

It must be accepted, however, that burial rite does vary, and, at the least, must be caused by a mood or attitude within a community or family, which in turn reflects their circumstances. Such attitudes will have changed at different rates for different people in different places: status, political ambition, tradition, belief, superstition and intellect all playing a part in the decision of what tomb to build. The problem with Sutton Hoo is that it belongs to a period when the range of burial rites 'available' was very wide, and it would not be easy to predict what would seem appropriate to the survivors of an early East Anglian king. This eclectic attitude is demonstrated in other ways, such as the 'polytheism' of the iconography of the bracteates described by Hauck and the intellectual freedom of Old English poetry, described by Shippey, not to mention the more obvious iconographic conflations of the Franks Casket or later Anglo-Viking sculpture<sup>34</sup>. We must be ready for some examples of burial practice at Sutton Hoo to reflect social organisation or religious belief, and others to reflect neither. It is probably this variation of significance (as well as practice) which gives the site its great potential.

(33) The results are documented from the comprehensive excavation of the cemetery of St. Helen-on-the-Walls, together with comparisons taken with Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Medieval Groups in Yorkshire, elsewhere in England and Scandinavia. See Palliser in DAWES and MAGILTON 1980. See CHAPMAN 1980: 69 for other examples of biological (rather than racial) differences causing skeletal change.

(34) For bracteates, HAUCK 1982. That Old English poets were more impressed by Christian doctrine as drama rather than fact or salvation is suggested by SHIPPEY, 1972. MITSCHA-MÄHRHEIM 1964 offers a similar view of religious eclecticism among upper class Lombards; Cf. "Il pluralismo culturale tipico del mondo longobardo", ROMANINI 1978. It must not be assumed that the presence of barrows at Sutton Hoo means that they *cannot* have had Christian burials or a Christian function, although the barrow itself is taken as a pagan attribute, cf. BULLOUGH 1983: 186-9.

Looking briefly at the components of Mound 1, we can see something of the influences which might have been at work. *Boat-burial* is distributed mainly along the coasts of the North Sea and the Baltic, beginning in the Roman Iron Age, and reaching a climax of popularity in the Viking period. Sutton Hoo-period boat-burials are found mainly in eastern Sweden and a prehistorian would certainly see a strong connection here; but boats themselves were not of course a monopoly of the Scandinavians<sup>35</sup>. *The treatment of the body* is far less geographically constrained. Whatever the interment in Mound 1, cremations and inhumations both certainly occur at Sutton Hoo, in the same era, aligned both north-south and east-west<sup>36</sup>. Although neither the trend to inhumation nor the trend to orientation are now thought to indicate Christianity<sup>37</sup>, it might appear, nevertheless, that inhumation is a 'higher-status' rite, one which became more popular under the message of universal salvation brought by the eastern religions<sup>38</sup>. Beowulf, however, in so far as his story represents an accurate memory, was cremated. Of the other possibility for Mound 1, that it had no body, the parallels are again to be found in Sweden. At Vendel and Valsgärde bodies were often absent, but the skeletons of horses survived, so the case for total human decay is here more difficult to argue<sup>39</sup>. No examples of a 'cenotaph' are known<sup>40</sup>, and

(35) For boat-burials see MÜLLER-WILLE 1974, SCHÖNBÄCK 1983. Beowulf contains 24 different *Kenning*s or affectionate expressions for boats (SHIPPEY 1972: 99). Oswy of Northumbria had a boat which could carry 120 men and used it to land in Sussex (Bede, with thanks to J. Campbell for this information).

(36) LONGWORTH and KINNES 1980; BRUCE-MITFORD 1975.

(37) RAHTZ 1978; VAN DOORSELAER 1983.

(38) MACDONALD 1977: 36; VAN DOORSELAER 1983.

(39) See ARRHENIUS 1983 (Vendel); ARDWIDSSON 1983 (Valsgärde).

(40) Chadwick in *Antiquity* 1940. The pits with pottery encountered in cemeteries of the Roman Iron age are not really equivalent to cenotaphs in the monumental sense (TODD 1977).

Arrhenius has suggested that some of the body-less burials may be sacrificial deposits. They would certainly continue a well-established tradition. Sacrifice remains an alternative possibility, even if a body *is* found, as has been proposed for the young girl buried at Vix. An attractive explanation for the absence of bodies at Sutton Hoo (and elsewhere) is that they were removed soon after burial and translated to consecrated ground by Christian descendants. This has been demonstrated at Jelling, where the body of King Gorm was apparently translated from a barrow into an adjacent church<sup>41</sup>. It is necessary to assume a superstitious purity of belief in both paganism and Christianity to explain why the grave goods were left in their original place of sacrifice.

The use of *grave-goods* is similarly equivocal. It is undeniably common in pre-Christian societies and uncommon in Christian, but it continues into the 8th century for burials of high-status persons supposed to be Christian, and beyond for those whose beliefs in the new doctrine should have been the most orthodox and strongly held - namely bishops and priests. The eventual absence of grave-goods in the Christian period might therefore be a matter of tax (the grave-scot paid to the church) rather than of belief, as Bradley (citing Duby) has suggested, a tax which depleted the graves of all but the very rich or holy<sup>42</sup>.

Where grave-goods do occur, they have been the principal means of detecting social organisation, if only because of a large legacy of excavated cemeteries which offers little else in the way of evidence<sup>43</sup>. Hodson for the Iron Age

(41) KROGH 1982.

(42) HINZ 1970; YOUNG 1977; BLAKE 1983. And see below for examples of later burials with grave-goods. The tradition continued for Bishops into the Norman period and beyond at Durham, Wells and elsewhere. For grave-scot, see BRADLEY 1981.

(43) Cf. BLAKE 1983; SHEPHARD 1979. In the Kentish cemeteries, unplanned barrows were dug at the rate of up to 100 in a season. FAUSSET 1856.

and Jankavs working in Oland have shown that the observation of ranking depends on large excavations in a number of *adjacent* and contemporary cemeteries, since special areas or special-purpose cemeteries may have been dedicated to a particular social class<sup>44</sup>. In the Anglo-Saxon period in England, wealth and barrows seem to go together, and the trend is towards increasingly high burial status in the later 6th and early 7th centuries<sup>45</sup>. For the Vendel period, Jankavs finds a similar trend, calling it, perhaps more accurately, 'status-seeking' and Melucco-Vaccaro has diagnosed the same for contemporary Lombardia<sup>46</sup>.

The trend towards status-seeking is already present on a small scale in later Romano-British cemeteries<sup>47</sup>, and in Roman Britain, as in western Gaul, barrows were constructed<sup>48</sup>. We need not suppose that the Anglo-Saxons brought the idea with them on migration, or that a later migration, eg. from Scandinavia, is needed to explain the use of barrows<sup>49</sup>; here, as elsewhere, it was a form of expression that was available, and found to be necessary,

(44) HODSON 1979; JANKAVS 1981; and see TODD 1977 for similar structures in the Roman Iron Age and BONA 1964 for Longobardic Pannonia.

(45) SHEPHARD 1979, 1981; ARNOLD 1980, 1982.

(46) For 'status-seeking', JANKAVS 1981. For similar conclusions on the Roman Iron Age, WHEELER 1955; and on early medieval N. Europe, HILLS 1983 and VIERCK 1980, recalling KOSSAK 1970. The same trend is visible in Ireland (R. Warner pers. comm.) Among the Lombards the process is at work in Pannonia (BONA 1964, TAGLIAFERRI 1964) and continues in Italy, resurging in the late 6th/7th century (MELUCCO VACCARO 1982: 122). A 'princely burial' has been found in Ravenna, not far from the archetypal mausoleum of Theodoric (ROTILJ 1983: 145). Barrows may have been used (or re-used) even here: the Mutera di Oderzo was raised by 2m in the post-roman period. See also SAWYER 1983 for the similar trend amongst the Svear of the Mälaren Valley.

(47) Trends towards high status observed at Lankhills late roman cemetery at Winchester. CLARKE 1981, ESMONDE-CLEARY 1983.

(48) VAN DOORSELAER 1983. Most British Roman barrows appear to be in East Anglia: GRINSELL 1936: 28. See note 78 below.

(49) MUSSET (1969: 157) raised the possibility of a later (6th - 7thC) immigration from the Germanic north, since under investigation by Dr. S. C. HAWKES.

quite suddenly, on a large scale, for a relatively short period.

The idea can also be seen to extend in a different guise, into the centuries immediately following conversion to Christianity. The philosophy, as Shippey has shown for poetry, — in this case the philosophy of immortality through success — remains the same, but its form of expression is modified<sup>50</sup>. Instead of being placed in a barrow, the wealthy burial is placed in a church or crypt<sup>51</sup>. At Hørning in Denmark a church was constructed over a levell-ed barrow containing a chamber grave, while at Jelling as noted above, the body was apparently translated from the adjacent barrow into the new church<sup>52</sup>. James has pointed out the importance of 'worthiness' in determining this special treatment, and 'unworthy' (pagan) burials must be cast out before a new church is consecrated, according to Theodore<sup>53</sup>.

Building a barrow and founding a church may well therefore have been analogous acts. James describes how burials cluster around the church, seeking the envied 'sub stillicidio' positions which received sanctified rain off the church roof, as can be seen, for example, at Castel Seprio<sup>54</sup>. Thomas has described a similar effect in the early christian cemeteries of Britain, which used a 'founder's tomb' as the focus<sup>55</sup>. A similar tendency may have already been present in the pagan cemeteries which immediately preceded these. Both configurations and the

(50) SHIPPEY, 1972.

(51) WERNER 1964 for Cologne and St. Denis. Royal burials of the early middle ages have been reviewed by KRÖGER 1971 and MÜLLER-WILLE 1983.

(52) RANDBORG 1981, KROGH 1982.

(53) JAMES 1980; Theodore *Penitential* II, i, 4-5 (my thanks to J. Campbell for this reference). See also BULLOUGH 1983: 189.

(54) JAMES 1980. For Castel Seprio, including the recent excavation of S. Maria foris portas, see CARVER, forthcoming.

(55) THOMAS 1971.

transitions between them, will be studied at Repton where the Biddles are now at work. Here the church of St. Wystan containing the mausoleum of the Mercian King, Wiglaf, lies in close proximity to mounds, which may include barrows. The mound excavated was of the Viking period, built over an earlier building, possibly a mausoleum<sup>56</sup>. It should not be assumed from these examples that church-building copied barrow-building. The barrows of high status cemeteries, and here we must include Sutton Hoo, may turn out to be a demonstrative reaction to Christianity, as the Roman temples of the 4th century had reacted before them.

Some further perspective on the significance of the burial practice at Sutton Hoo might be given by an exactly contemporary situation at the opposite extremity of the Empire. The Ballana culture (or 'X-group') flourished in Nubia between the 3rd and 6th century AD, in the context of the retreating Roman frontier. Initially under Meroitic domination, they emerged three centuries later as a Christian state. In between, they reverted, with great accuracy, to the burial practice of the Kerma culture of 2000 years previously. 'Royal' cemeteries of large barrows surrounded by numerous simpler tombs were constructed; Meroitic stone temples were deliberately destroyed; settlement shifted from the towns and 'disappeared' becoming decentralised and built of ephemeral materials. The urban middle class seems to have survived only at Quasr Ibrim, an entrepôt at some distance from the cemetery nucleus. The art of writing was discontinued, and the content of the great tombs reveal 'archaising' throw-backs in terms of ritual practice and regalia. The iconography was

(56) Work at Repton is now in progress. My thanks to M. Biddle and B. Kolbye-Biddle for information on their project in advance of publication.



ecletic, so that Tomb 2 at Ballana yielded a gold cross, a scarab, a gold strip with a love-charm in corrupt Greek and three lead curses. On conversion to Christianity in the later 6th century, the 'Royal' and pagan burial practices disappeared rapidly and almost totally, being revived on a small scale only for the burial of Bishops and other church notables<sup>57</sup>.

This comparatively detailed information comes from extensive investigation of the great cemeteries of Ballana and Q'ustul, and of the surrounding region, before the construction of the Aswan Dam; all that remains now lies beneath Lake Nasser. Adams points out that such 'archaeising' phases are not unique, and often precede 'modernising' revolutions of a fundamental kind. No large scale immigration is thought to be responsible for the Ballana culture; indeed barrow-building had already begun among the native population while they were under Meroitic domination. It was a society which simply 'went heroic'.

The analogies with Anglo-Saxon England are clear enough. Although there some immigration had taken place, it does not have to be responsible for everything (or anything) that we see. The archaeological and anthropological parallels allow Sutton Hoo to be explained as the expression of newly claimed power by an aspiring aristocracy which can have arisen from the ranks of a native population<sup>58</sup>.

(57) ADAMS 1977: 382-429.

(58) This new aspiration to high status (culminating presumably in 'kingship') in 6th/7th century Britain emerges quite naturally from the archaeological evidence and it is heartening to note that it does not contradict similar trends detected largely from documentary evidence. WALLACE-HADRILL (1975: 181-2) remarks "Connoisseurs of the Merovingians will know how little of kingship of any kind came over the Rhine with the Franks. Merovingian kingship was constructed in Gaul out of war-leadership and Roman administrative techniques: and the men who did the work were as often as not churchmen". WALLACE-HADRILL (1975: 214) and DUMVILLE (1977: 81) have demonstrated that a Royal genealogy (such as that published for Raedwald, BRUCE-MITFORD 1975) could be constructed to express and support a contemporary political situation, and was a novelty (perhaps of Celtic

The impatient historian might well say that it is hardly necessary to approach the documented fact of middle-saxon Kingship with such contrived caution. But Kingship has not been strictly demonstrated here. All that is implied by the archaeological context is a widespread trend towards demonstrative rank in the cemeteries of north and central Europe, which is particularly marked in areas of Germanic migration. If, as it appears, the process is most visible in the later 6th or early 7th centuries, it clearly does not have to be caused directly by contact with Roman systems, to which many of the protagonists by that time belonged, but rather by a later opportunity for the exercise of power. For some groups this opportunity may even have been expressed by a reaction *from* Roman culture, and the conscious assumption of a previous identity, based on folk-memory, 'archaeological' observation, the artistic translation of pagan notions, and plain invention where necessary<sup>59</sup>. Such powerful political moods are not unknown to modern history, and are at least possible in the remoter past. The principal problem here is to distinguish between increase of burial status as an index of increased ranking in society, and increase in burial status as an index of changing burial practice. In other words, a hierarchichal society can exist but remains archaeologically obscure until the moment arrives, for whatever reason, that pagan and Christian alike favour demonstrative burial rites. Naturally, such interpretations of behaviour depend heavily on context. If this context is presently uncertain, in so far as it could be given by site-position, site type and burial practice, do the artifacts themselves, belonging in general to a better-known world, establish it more securely?

inspiration) to Germanic society. WORMALD (1977: 138) suggests that Law codes had a similar 'image-building' function.

(59) ADAMS 1977; TRIGGER 1969; and see CHAPMAN 1980: 69.



## IV.

The thorough researches of Bruce-Mitford and his colleagues at the British Museum have gathered the comparative material available for the diverse objects found in the mound 1 boat, and they have arrived at a probable date and place of manufacture for each. The material thought to be exotic falls into six groups. Items of military equipment, including the shield and helmet and perhaps the harness itself, have eastern Scandinavian connections<sup>60</sup>. All the silverware originated from the Eastern mediterranean, ie. Constantinople or nearby<sup>61</sup>. The hanging-bowls are West British, from Wales or N. Britain<sup>62</sup>. The combs are from Saxony<sup>63</sup>. The coins are from Merovingian Gaul<sup>64</sup>. Some of the textiles are from the eastern mediterranean: a tunic and a yellow cloak: while others were embroidered in 'Scandinavian' fashion<sup>65</sup>. To these six groups can be added the 'Coptic' bowl which belongs to a relatively better known class of object<sup>66</sup>. These points of provenance are summarised on the map (fig. 8), on which, to provide some contrast, are also shown scriptoria producing or receiving insular manuscripts in the generation following Sutton Hoo<sup>67</sup>.

(60) See BRUCE-MITFORD 1978a 91, 97 (Shield); 205 (helmet); 304 (sword), 237 (mailcoat); and *passim* (harness). The sword pyramids are however viewed as from the 'Sutton Hoo Workshop' *Ibid*, 304.

(61) See BRUCE-MITFORD 1983: 45 (great silver dish); 115 ('Sassanian' silver bowls). The silver as a whole is seen as a coherent group obtained from contemporary Constantinople, and taken into use in East Anglia as an adjunct of Anglo-Saxon courtly life (*Ibid* 163).

(62) See BRUCE-MITFORD 1983: 265. Hanging bowl 110 is dated c600 although already repaired at the time of burial with a (Locally-made) patch.

(63) See BRUCE-MITFORD 1983: 827-830. Provenance suggested as Elbe region, Saxony and Frisia.

(64) See BRUCE-MITFORD 1975: 581, 603 and see below.

(65) See BRUCE-MITFORD 1983, 456.

(66) See BRUCE-MITFORD, 1983, 743.

(67) Derived from ALEXANDER 1978.

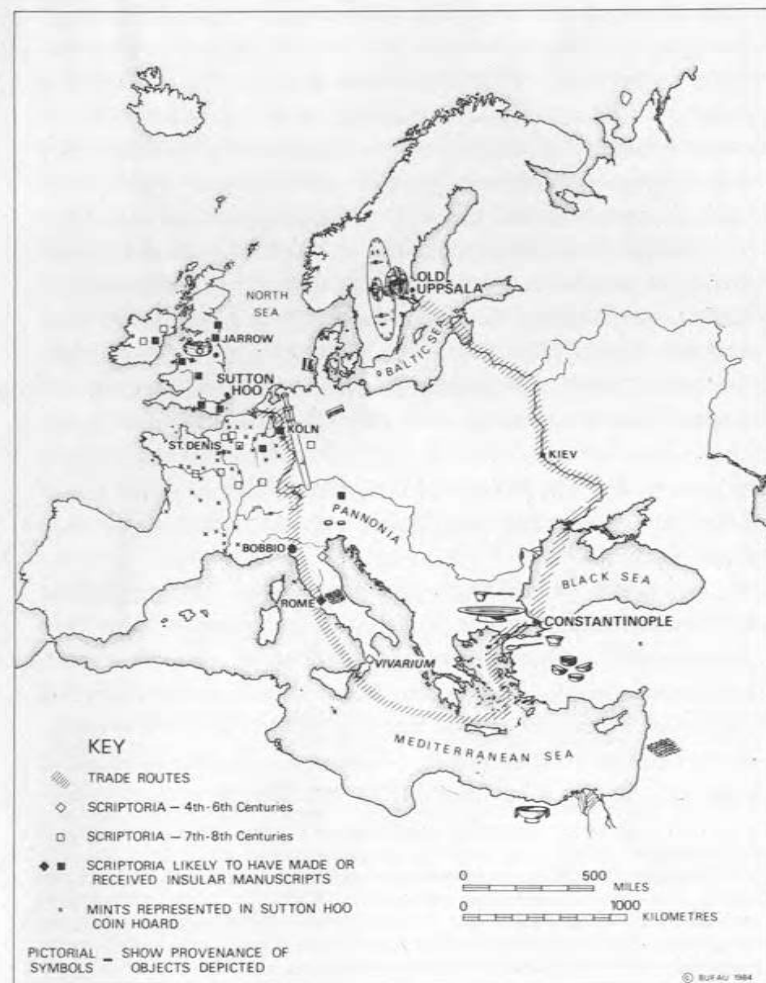


FIG. 8 - Provenance of objects found in Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo (drawn by E. Hooper)

At first sight one might claim that pagan and Christian Anglo-Saxons had the same opportunities for tourism in Europe; but although this might be true, the map does not allow us to say so. The immediate origin of the Sutton Hoo objects, not easy to parallel in any case, is bound to be insecure, since they are mobile and desirable objects. The dates assigned to manufacture are placed fairly close to the date assigned for the burial (in 625 AD), so that the relay of such goods between courts or trading stations would have to have been fairly rapid. With the possible exception of the Anastasius dish, we are not, it seems, talking about antiques. Nevertheless, the map does *not* imply that 7thC East Anglian merchants or emissaries were in direct contact with Byzantium or Syria. The supposed exchange mechanism would allow all the Sutton Hoo objects to have been acquired at Northern European fairs or from Scandinavia, having reached these areas by one of several hypothetical routes<sup>68</sup>.

Werner's central route, passing up the Rhine and into Italy and thence by sea to Byzantium is one of the best documented. There is no doubt that an eastern route, perhaps passing along the Dvina and Dnieper and into the Black Sea, existed; the problem is rather when the Scandinavians started regularly to exploit it. Thulin doubts the presence of any Scandinavian community, at least one call-

(68) LEVISON (1943: 8) showed the importance of the documented north European fairs and the 'via rectissima' which began at Quentovic. WERNER 1961 maps the Rhine route (see HAWKES, SC. 1982) which crosses the Alps and thence via Bobbio to Ostia and by sea to Byzantium. TAGLIAFERRI 1964 prefers routes running from Marseille or Ravenna for the Italian leg of the journey, pointing up the importance of river traffic on the Po and its tributaries documented from 5th-9thC. VIERCK, 1981, Abb. 1 shows a western route between England-Frisia and Scandinavia. How much actual trade was involved along these hypothetical exchange routes is of course debatable. On exchange by gift, tribute and barter, see SAWYER, 1977. For Levison, Tagliaferri and others 'invisible exports' such as slaves must be taken into account as well as the despatch of diplomatic gifts. See also HODGES 1980.

ing itself 'Rus', north of the Black sea before the Viking period, and Callmer finds no clear evidence of pre-Viking long distance trade at Kiev. Benedicz expresses similar caution, but points out that the question remains open; the route existed, the Scandinavians had boats, and their subsequent links with Byzantium are known<sup>69</sup>. The evidence for direct contact between Scandinavia, particularly Sweden, and eastern Europe at least, is increasing, and this evidence ranges from metalwork styles and iconography, to saddles and the practice of falconry. Many scholars feel that the adoption of style II ornament did not have to wait for the Lombards to arrive in north Italy in 568, but may have developed in the earlier 6th century as a result of Frankish involvement there, or of close Swedish contact with eastern Europe<sup>70</sup>.

The purely archaeological picture might therefore allow us to speculate that the majority of the exotic artefacts at Sutton Hoo could be explained by contacts with just two neighbouring cultures; the Swedish and the Frankish. Of the two, it is perhaps the Frankish which deserves further

(69) THULIN, 1981. CALLMER, 1981 shows that Kiev was a 'gateway' settlement which began its serious function in 850-900 AD. The 'Scandinavian' element is here deduced from the presence of rich chamber graves, providing an interesting parallel with the situation at Sutton Hoo, only very rarely suggested as itself Scandinavian (see note 49 above).

My thanks to B. Benedicz for his observations. VIERCK 1981 concludes that an eastern European route existed from the early Germanic (Roman) Iron Age and has proposed another, even more easterly passing via Stary Ladoga and the Volga (1983).

(70) ABERG (1947) describes Style II as born of contact between the Lombards and Romans and in Italy, although earlier (1923) he had proposed a wider exchange. BRUCE-MITFORD 1979 sees Lombard influence on Vendel. SPEAKE (1980) sees the origin of English Style II in Scandinavia, thus completing the linear transmission. See now ARRHENIUS 1982, 1983; BÖHNER 1982; ALMGREN 1983; HEDEAGER and KRISTIANSEN 1982; VIERCK 1981 for Scandinavian absorption of classical ideas, and the invention of Style II in Pannonia before 568 and its simultaneous diffusion in Central Europe. AKENSTROM-HOUGEN 1981 for the introduction of falconry both as sport and motif with distinct upper-class connotations, from the Mediterranean into England and Scandinavia, and Sjösbärd 1983 for a falcon in a 'princely' cremation. For HILLS 1979, Style II can be both earlier than 568 and indigenous. HAWKES CFC 1964 reminds us of the Frankish involvement in Italy in the early 6th century.

investigation. The over-riding influence of eastern Scandinavia, favoured by Bruce-Mitford, is doubted by Werner and Wilson, and in any case, the Vendel cemetery was itself coming under Frankish influence at the same period<sup>71</sup>. Whether or not the Franks were themselves the begetters of Style II, Merovingian Gaul is the one candidate in the arena with pretensions to statehood and expansion in the 6th century<sup>72</sup>. The 37 gold coins, each originating from a different mint there, imply a collection which is not mercantile<sup>73</sup>. It would be truly remarkable if the only things that Anglo-Saxons were receiving from Franks were gifts of money.

Of some importance here is the role of Kent, where contemporary Frankish influence is not in doubt and whose own wealth and garnet jewellery echoes that of the Franks<sup>74</sup>. It was, moreover, itself exporting glass vessels to eastern Scandinavia at this time<sup>75</sup>. One does wonder if the wealth of the Sutton Hoo burial would have occa-

(71) WERNER 1982; WILSON 1983. AMBROSIANI 1983b: 27 defines the Vendel material as part of general Germanic culture, not particular to Sweden. For Frankish influence in the Vendel cemetery c. 600 see ARRHENIUS 1983: 54-5.

(72) eg WERNER 1964: 201-2.

(73) Rigold and Kent in BRUCE-MITFORD 1975 suggest that the Sutton Hoo hoard is a selection made from the royal treasury, and BRUCE-MITFORD himself decides that it was a collection, which if originally a gift, had been 'stored' (1975: 585). However, the mint distribution and the dissimilarity in the composition of the hoard with others known and with the coinage infiltration into Britain as a whole, seems to mark Sutton Hoo out as something special and not, in any case, mercantile in character. The arguments used by Grierson (1970) which proposed the coins as payment for the oarsmen, still do not explain their provenance. For they could be a ceremonial funeral tribute from 37 Merovingian cities (not all identified, but distributed evenly over the Empire as far as is known), made up to 40 (plus two ingots) for whatever reason by the Merovingian treasury. It might well be worth examining whether these coins make a statement about the contemporary Merovingian hegemony rather than East Anglian burial practice.

(74) Frankish material was coming into Kent from c. 500 AD (SC HAWKES, 1982: 71). Most imported Frankish gold coinage was destined for Kent (Rigold in BRUCE-MITFORD 1975: 662). Ethelbert of Kent married Charibert I's daughter, Bertha, who was actually the great niece of Arnegunde, whose tomb (with Style II prototypes) has been identified as one of those found at St. Denis (CFC HAWKES 1964; WERNER 1964).

(75) EVISON 1982; S. C. HAWKES 1982.

sioned such surprise, had it been found in a Kentish cemetery. Of the rich Taplow barrow burial, which is no nearer to Kent than is Sutton Hoo, Dr. Hawkes has claimed that "all the artifacts could have been made in Kent"<sup>76</sup>. The links of the East Anglian royal house with Kent are documented (Raedwald was baptised there), but leaving that aside, the feeling of a strong Kentish connection is not lessened, if we return to the context of Sutton Hoo, "prehistorically" considered. The style and wealth of the metalwork are matched there, and it is there that the use of the barrow cemetery predominates. If the analogies produced for other places and periods (above) are valid for early medieval Europe, then Sutton Hoo can look as much to Kent as to Francia or Scandinavia for its inspiration.

This may of course be to confuse the source of a particular practice or attribute with the place in which it temporarily holds sway. What was the role of the Romano-British or Celtic population in all this? The least equivocal links are those of metal-work styles, seen at Sutton Hoo on the hanging-bowls (above), although whether these imply indigenous transmission or imports from some post-Roman Celtic realm has yet to be resolved. Other candidates for Celtic influence, or Germanic emulation of hypothetical Celtic practice, are the sceptre and the standard themselves, and this is significant. For at Sutton Hoo in particular we may be in the position of having to identify tutors in the affectations of kingship other than English clerics. Anglo-Saxons may well have first adapted kingship from the Celts, in regalia as in genealogy, even if the business was soon taken in hand by their own ecclesiastical mentors<sup>77</sup>. Lastly, it may be indigenous Britons to whom

(76) S. C. HAWKES 1982: 76.

(77) See note 58.

we should look for the transmission of the rite of barrow burial itself<sup>78</sup>.

## V.

The context of Sutton Hoo, interpreted in strictly archaeological terms, is, therefore, pagan, 'heroic' and status-seeking: the work of pretentious and acquisitive parvenues, aspiring to 'royalty' and adopting or inventing or recalling ill-remembered traditions to lend dignity to a power based on the exploitation of the rural wealth of the local community. To belong to such a European elite was no doubt of far greater significance to them than to be East Anglians, or even, indeed Angles, or Saxons, or Anglo-Saxons. This self-appointed international aristocratic community had a bright future before it.

Building such diverse hypotheses is still possible at present, because of gaps and uncertainties in the data. A clear explanation of the site and the European context and anthropological process to which it belongs will only come with more and better archaeological evidence. This evidence must be considered on its own terms, unhindered initially by suggestions from the documentary record.

This is the spirit of the new campaign which began in 1983. It is intended firstly to confront the acid conditions of the Sandlings by developing methods of detecting timber and bone which have decayed to the point of invisibility. We must be sure, in future, whether or not a body is present in a barrow. At the same time, methods of precise 3-dimensional recording and methods of taking slices for dendrochronology from decayed timber will be developed. In this way, we can be surer of the detailed structure and

(78) For the Roman princely barrow burial at Bartlow, Essex, see GAGE 1836.

date of any burial-chambers that are found. The structure of the barrows themselves will be given mainly by tip-lines in loose sand; here too, chemical or physical techniques will be needed<sup>79</sup>. The boundaries, plan and sequence of the whole cemetery will be retrieved by locating barrows, inhumations and cremations, together with the more subtle surface features that might indicate ritual behaviour.

This cemetery will be compared with the settlements and cemeteries of the surrounding region of East Anglia, and the changing environment, investigated as part of an intensive survey by air, land and water, to be carried out mainly by the Suffolk Archaeological Unit. Although we are relatively late in the field with these large area surveys, the territory of East Anglia, with its ceramic continuity between the Roman and medieval periods, certainly has great potential<sup>80</sup>. At the same time, we will be seeking advice and an exchange of expertise with others working on similar problems in various prehistoric or historic periods in the countries of Europe. We may never achieve a synoptic view of, for example, metalwork styles and forms without a centralised and computerised corpus of all the material.

The campaign thus divides into *site operations*, a *regional study* and a *comparative study*, each of which is collaborative. From them we hope to answer the questions which I have tried to confront in this paper: what is the

(79) Barrows may have been constructed by workmen to order or by ceremonial deposition of basket-loads by mourners (GRINSELL 1936). The construction ritual (if any) should be reflected in the tip-lines which should be detectable by chemical methods. Such methods, also applicable to the decay products from bodies, timber and other organic matter is the subject of a research project at Sutton Hoo sponsored by the Leverhulme Trust.

(80) For similar surveys in progress, see Bertilssen in LUNDSTRÖM and CLARKE for Helgö; EDGREN and HERSCHEND for Öland; HYENSTRAND 1981 and AMBROSIANI et al 1982 for the Mälaren Valley; HIGELKE et al 1981 for the Nordever project. For JAMES 1980, regional survey is most productive method of exploring Merovingian Gaul.



real date-range, character and context of the site at Sutton Hoo, in terms of its burial practice, its geographical siting and contacts with other cultures?

I should emphasise in conclusion that we shall try and achieve this objective with the minimum attrition either of the landscape or of the site at Sutton Hoo itself. The development of non-destructive remote sensing techniques is another objective of a project which hopes to create new methodology applicable far beyond its own historical pre-occupations. Plate II shows Mike Gorman's soil-sounding radar which is a present crawling over the Sutton Hoo site, mapping many things that still lie hidden beneath. It is also by such means as this that we hope to eventually reveal something of that complex system of which the great ship burial was one extravagant episode<sup>81</sup>.

### Acknowledgements

Sutton Hoo generates strong opinions and any attempt to reduce its glittering profile to archaeological reality, so necessary for the investigation of its context, is bound to be open to criticism. I am all the more grateful to those who have helped and educated me and would particularly like to thank here the members of the Sutton Hoo Research Committee, together with Keith Wade, Rosemary Cramp, Peter Sawyer, and most of all Rupert Bruce-Mitford, whose generosity towards me is only the latest of his many patient services to this great site.

(81) The Sutton Hoo research project is sponsored by the Society of Antiquaries of London, the British Museum, the British Broadcasting Corporation, Suffolk County Council, and the National Maritime Museum (among others). Notice of work in progress or planned will be found in the *Bulletin of the Sutton Hoo Research Committee* available from the Project Centre at the University of Birmingham, England. For a recent debate on the wisdom of further excavation at Sutton Hoo, see RAHTZ, 1980.

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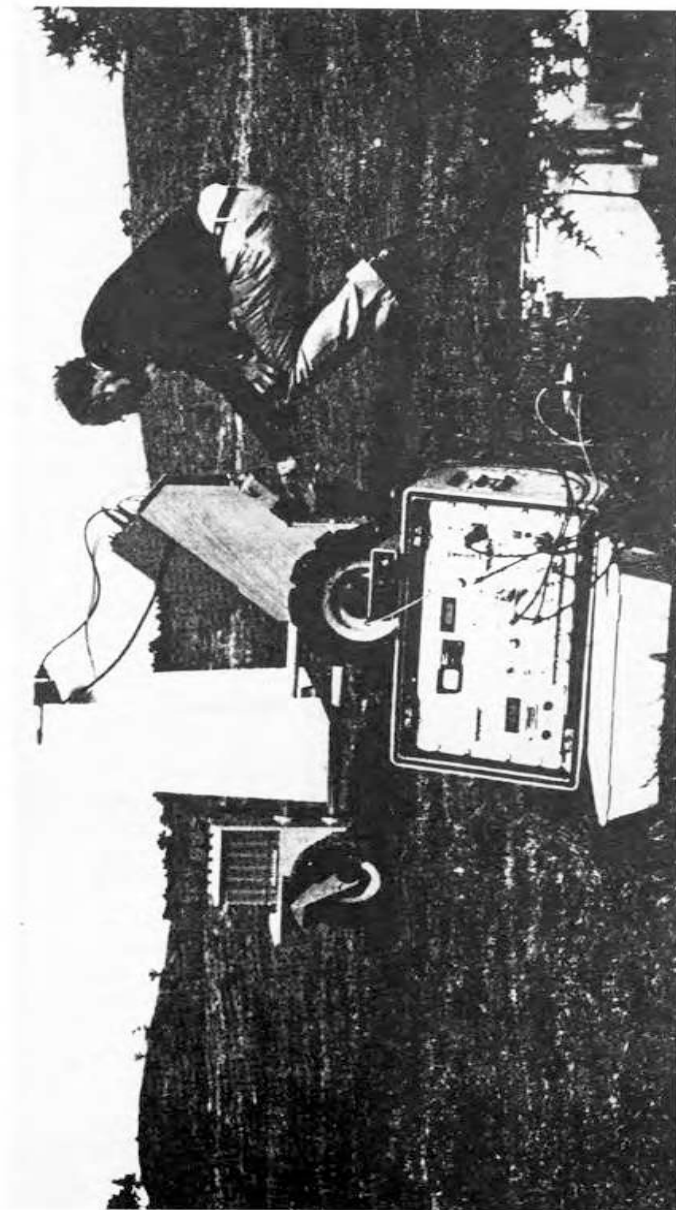


PLATE 2: M. Gorman's Soil Sounding Radar in action at Sutton Hoo in 1983.

### Discussione sulla lezione Carver

BULLOUGH: *just two very short comments on related questions raised by Mr Carver, one of them also relevant to something in Mr Bruce Mitford's paper. One of Mr Carver's questions was, I think: is there any anthropological evidence that cemetery sites, major cemetery sites, are in places where they can look over a whole territory? and he gave a negative answer. It is a question that I have asked also and equally not been able to find any specific answer. The only piece of post-prehistoric, early historical evidence that I could find, was the passage quoted by Mr Charles-Edwards in relation to early Ireland which put forward the notion that you put the graves of people on the boundaries of your land where they could exercise a protective function, and his very striking comment that relegated to the grave-yards of churches they ceased to protect the land of their ancestors. This is, I suppose, much the same idea; but I could not find anything comparable in any Germanic law or in any chronicle relating to a Germanic society even, though the notion is sometimes implicit.*

*The second comment in fact is more directed at Mr Bruce-Mitford. Like others, he is worried that if the person buried at Sutton-Hoo or in any other of these sites is supposedly a Christian, one would expect them to be in consecrated ground. I argued elsewhere that this is in fact a false worry and a pseudo-problem: the whole notion of*

burying in consecrated ground is a surprisingly late development, indeed essentially Carolingian; I tried to show that there is in fact ample indirect evidence, and a certain amount of direct evidence, that the church was for a surprisingly long time indifferent to the way and where people were buried, so this does not help any argument over religious affiliation one way or another. That brings me to my final questions. Allowing the possibility, therefore, that the Sutton-Hoo site could be on the edge of an area over which authority was exercised, does Mr Carver see any merit in the view expressed in a recent paper by, I think, Jonathan Shepherd on Anglo-Saxon barrows that they are actual symbols of authority? and can it be reconciled with the notion expressed in the same volume of *« British Archaeological Reports »* that if you were depositing a whole lot of material, — rich material — you were not trying to secure future authority for your dynasty. Rather, that belonging to a society believing that inequality should not be sustained, by depositing goods you make sure that nobody accumulates wealth in too great a way over too long a period — although of course this notion is superseded quite quickly. I don't know whether Mr. Carver would like to react to this approach in the present context.

CARVER: discussing this problem recently with James Campbell he reminded me that the treasure of Sutton Hoo need not represent a very sizeable proportion of the wealth of the people to whom it referred. Now this is of course highly speculative, but so perhaps is the idea that the deposition of wealth results in an equalizing function in the society which goes on living, if I have understood the question rightly. I personally do believe that these princely burials are an attempt to show status in a very forceful manner, even though the status might only be declared on

the day of the funeral. It then lives on in the form of a monument. My question was: is there any other function for these cemeteries, which it behoves me as an excavator to search for? Do they have a role as guardians of frontiers or for "documenting" territory, and if so, what is their relation to that territory? Are they used as moots? Without asking these questions one does not really arrive at a set of techniques designed to answer them.

BULLOUGH: what is your own feeling at the moment?

CARVER: my own feeling is that I should have no feelings. I am a scientist and excavate to show what is there. But I do have to at least ask myself how I would show something to be there which is so fugitive. I am at a loss to know how you would show whether a barrow was used as a moot; it's a moot point in fact, whether you could.

SAWYER: in outlining the very ambitious Sutton Hoo project, which we all wish well, Mr Carver has explained that analogies will play a part. Two that he mentioned relate to Scandinavia and a comment on one of these may be helpful. Mr Carver drew attention to the very important boat-grave cemeteries of Eastern Sweden, the best known being at Vendel and Valsgärde, and made a number of points that call for comment. First, it has been said that these cemeteries were peripheral to the Mälars valley, which was a populous area. Determining the population in prehistoric times is obviously difficult, but this is one area where we may perhaps be able to make some reasonable estimates, thanks to the very elaborate registration of surviving pre-historic remains. Björn Ambrosiani has argued that in the Mälars region, that is Uppland, Västmanland and Södermanland, a very large area indeed,

there were at the beginning of the Viking period some 1,000 farms and at the end of that period there were about 4,000. It is therefore somewhat misleading to describe the area as populous in the pre-Viking or Vendel period.

Secondly, references was made to the existence of an elaborate network of centres called *Husaby* in that area. There are reasons to think that these names belong to the post-Vendel period. This is the conclusion drawn by both place-name scholars, notably Lars Hellberg, and also archaeologists. There is a close association between the places called *Husaby* and the administrative divisions called *hundreds* which seem to have been formed no earlier than the eleventh century. This suggests that the *Husaby* names are irrelevant in discussion of the Vendel period.

Thirdly, it was said that boat-grave cemeteries were themselves peripheral. It is true that Vendel was well outside the area that was settled at that time, but other cemeteries of the same type and period lay well within the settled area. There is, for example, the cemetery at *Tuna in Badelunda*, near *Västerås*. There is another further west at *Köping*, near *Västerås*.

The boat-grave cemeteries are unlike other contemporary gravefields in that area because they include inhumations as well as the more familiar cremations. The earliest phase has the inhumations in wooden chambers but by the seventh century they were in boats, as at *Sutton Hoo*. This pattern is common to several cemeteries and we must therefore seek the origin of the tradition in the earliest phase, that is apparently the fourth century, perhaps earlier.

Finally, it is important to note that the cemetery at *Tuna in Badelunda* is very unusual. In most other cemeteries of this type the men buried in chambers or boats while women were cremated; in *Tuna in Badelunda* the

chambers and boats contained women, while the men were cremated. The same is true at *Köping*. I will not attempt here to suggest any conclusions that should be drawn from this. I will only say that if the evidence of the Vendel period in the *Mälaren* region is to be used in discussions about *Sutton Hoo*, the curious character of these two cemeteries needs to be carefully considered.

CARVER: thank you very much, Professor Sawyer, for those valuable observations. I am not going to try and justify the analogies that I drew with the *Mälaren* valley, and indeed it would be imprudent to do so after his intervention. I think that I was trying to draw attention to two contradictory factors. On the one hand I was trying to say that the geographical position of *Sutton Hoo* is not central to East Anglia and therefore it is no use trying to involve it in some theory which involves a central place for the burial of kings, as some have done. On the other hand I was trying to say that it may not be as unique as it looks, but there may be other, similar burial grounds in East Anglia. Personally I am very attracted by the models which have been constructed both in Sweden and in Frankia for the evolution of these cemeteries, and this is something which has got to be examined in East Anglia as thoroughly as it has been in Sweden and is being in Frankia. So I really agree.

NOTE: Professor Sawyer's comments on population arise from a misunderstanding. I referred to "the populace of the *Mälaren* valley" (see p. 88) not to "the populous *Mälaren* valley".